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Source: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 4 (Oct., 1931), pp. 783-790

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25194355>

Accessed: 04/05/2013 09:01

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The Libraries of David and Solomon

By A. H. SAYCE

A LITTLE to the north of Latakia on the Phœnician coast important discoveries have been made by French excavators. Bronze Age necropolises, now known as Minet el-Baida, and dating from about 1700 to 1200 B.C., have been found, and on an adjoining site, Ras Shamra, the remains of a palace have been uncovered, the most flourishing age of which would seem to have been the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. In the ruins of the palace an armoury, or, rather, workshop, filled with bronze weapons and implements has been brought to light, as well as a library. The latter was not only once filled with inscribed papyri, but fortunately also with clay tablets which have survived to our time. At least five different languages are represented by the cuneiform texts of which the clay tablets were a necessary accompaniment. One of these was the official Babylonian of the Tel el-Amarna period. Another was Sumerian, a third probably Mitannian, while a fourth proves to be Canaanite, that is to say, Early Phœnician or Hebrew, written in a very simplified form of cuneiform script which has been reduced into an alphabet of twenty-eight letters. The words, moreover, are divided one from the other.

The discovery of this early cuneiform alphabet is sensational, more especially when coupled with the discovery of the Phœnician inscription on the tomb of King Akhram at Gebal (Jebël), which is proved by the inscription on the rock-wall of the shaft of the tomb to be of the same date as the articles found with the sarcophagus, that is to say, the age of Ramses II, or the thirteenth century B.C. Another inscription of a little later date has been found recently at Byblos (Gebal).¹ The discoveries push back the use of the

¹ This inscription belongs to Yakhi-melek, king of Gebal (Dunand, *Rev. Biblique*, xxxix, 3, July, 1930).

Phœnician alphabet by nearly four centuries, and show, moreover, that the forms of the letters underwent surprisingly little change during that period. This means that they had already been stereotyped by long usage, and must have been extensively employed: hence the imitation of them in the cuneiform script. Unfortunately only in the dry climate of Upper Egypt would the papyrus (or parchment) upon which they were written have been preserved. And as yet no stone or metal monuments have been discovered upon which the earlier pictographic originals of the letters would have been engraved, unless it be at Sinai, where recent research has made it probable that in certain "scribings" of the twelfth dynasty period we really have the primitive alphabet of Phœnicia. That the letters originated in a pictographic script can be inferred not only from their names, but also from some of their forms.

The new discoveries entail important consequences. It becomes necessary to revise what have hitherto been accepted beliefs as regards the use and antiquity of the Phœnician alphabet. It is no longer necessary to believe that in the Mosaic or even in the Tel el-Amarna age the only form of script and of writing material in the Near East, apart from Egypt, would have been the cuneiform syllabary and the clay tablet. On the contrary, the libraries of Canaan would have been filled with inscribed papyri, which accounts for the fact that excavations in Palestine have brought to light so little in the way of early literary remains. There is no longer any difficulty in believing that there were abundant literary documents for compiling the earlier books of the Old Testament, or that we have in the latter copies of works which go back to the age to which they profess to belong. The Song of Deborah and Barak, for example, could easily have been preserved in a Palestinian library. The "writing-staff of a scribe" is already mentioned in it, implying the use, not of the tablet and stylus, but of the ink and pen (see also Gen. xlix, 10). The educated world of the East had long been acquainted

with the libraries of Babylonia and Egypt; history and law, theology and philosophy, and even the novel, had long been represented in them; and what held true of Babylonia and Egypt would have held true also of Canaan. The story of Sanchuniathon can no longer be regarded as a myth.

Consequently there is no longer any need of our believing as I formerly did that cuneiform tablets lie behind the text of the earlier Biblical books. Doubtless use was made from time to time of cuneiform materials; the library of Ras Shamra shows that they existed side by side with papyrus rolls—as, indeed, they also did in Babylonia—but except where the account is manifestly derived from a Babylonian source, as in the case of Gen. xi, 29, or xiv, 5,¹ we need no longer expect to find traces of a cuneiform original.

On the other hand, the scribes included “translators” or *targumanni*, as they were called in Hittite. At Ras Shamra they studied Sumerian, Babylonian, Mitannian, and possibly Cypriote; in the libraries of the Hittite capital at Boghaz Keui the foreign languages were Sumerian, Babylonian, Mitannian, and Proto-Hittite. Among the records of the Tel el-Amarna foreign correspondence were letters in Hittite and Mitannian, as well as lists of foreign words. The royal library of Jerusalem also may have carried on the old tradition; in fact, the Biblical account of the Deluge seems to have been derived from a Mitannian rather than a Babylonian source, if we may judge from the name of Noah, which goes back to Nakham according to Gen. v, 29,² and the whole of

¹ Gen. xi, 29: “The father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah”; alternative readings, the same cuneiform character having the values of *mil* and *is*. Gen. xiv, 5: “The Zuzim in Ham” as compared with the “Zamzummim” and “Ammonites” of Deut. ii, 20, the cuneiform *w(u)* and *m* being expressed by the same character like *h(a)* and *’a*. The list of Israelitish encampments in Num. xxxiii, 2–49, implies a Hebrew rather than a cuneiform (or Egyptian) original. And “the book of the Wars of Yahveh” (Num. xxi, 14) like the Song of the Well (Num. xxi, 17–18) must certainly have been written in the Phœnician alphabet and the Hebrew language.

² In the fragments of the Mitannian version of the story of the Deluge found at Boghaz Keui the hero’s name is Nakhma-ul-el, where (*e*)*l* is the nominative suffix and *-ul* an adjectival formative.

the foreign literature would not necessarily have been upon clay tablets. The Babylonians made use of papyrus (*liu*) as well as of clay, and Professor Dougherty has made it clear that *sipru* signified a "papyrus-roll" in opposition to *duppu* the clay "tablet". *Sipru* is already found in the Cappadocian tablets (2300 B.C.). Egyptological discovery has also shown that Prov. xxii, 17-xxiv, 22, is translated from an Egyptian original,¹ and Prov. xxx and xxxi are also derived from foreign sources.

A royal library was naturally established as soon as David had made himself master of Jerusalem and had entered into rivalry with the other kings of the Oriental world. It was a necessary proof, as we now know, that he was really a king. Accordingly, by the side of the Chancellor of the Exchequer we find the *mazkîr* or "Chronicler", together with "a scribe" Shiya, who is associated with the two chief priests, as well as Ira, the king's chaplain (2 Sam. xx, 24). In 2 Sam. viii, 17, "Seraiah a scribe" is named after the two priests; at the beginning of Solomon's reign (1 Kings iv, 3) his place is taken by the two "sons of Shisha, scribes". Shisha is the Shusha of 1 Chron. xviii, 16, where his name has been substituted, erroneously it would appear, for that of Seraiah. It will be noticed that in all cases there is no definite article; Seraiah, like Shiya, is simply "a scribe", a single member of a class.² It is also noteworthy that Shusha resembles an Aramaic rather than a Hebrew name. In 1 Kings iv, 5, the scribes are classed with the priest Zabud, son of Nathan, who was

¹ Erman, *Sitzungsberichte d. Preussischen Akademie*, 1924, pp. 86-92. Erman shows that the enigmatical *shalshîm* of the Hebrew text (xxii, 20) is a reference to the "30 chapters" into which the corresponding "Wisdom of Amen-em-ap(t)" was divided. The latter work may have been compiled out of earlier materials about the same time as when the library of Solomon was established.

² "Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiyathar (were) priests, Seraiah being a scribe"; "Eli-horeph and Ahijah sons of Shisha being scribes, Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud being the chronicler". So in 2 Sam. xx, 24, 25: "Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud being the chronicler, Shiya (? Shisha) a scribe and Zadok and Abiyathar priests." In 2 Sam. viii, 16, and 1 Chron. xviii, 16, the definite article is omitted also before *mazkîr* "chronicler".

"the king's friend", a title borrowed from the court of Egypt.

Nathan himself, if not the actual author of a book on the history of the reigns of David and Solomon, was at least the source or dictator of one according to 1 Chron. xxix, 29, and 2 Chron. ix, 29. Here we read: "The history of David the king from first to last, behold it is written according to the account of Samuel the seer and according to the account of Nathan the prophet and according to the account of Gad the diviner"; "the rest of the history of Solomon from first to last, is it not written according to the account of Nathan the prophet and according to the prophecies of Ahijah of Shiloh and in the visions of Y'adi the diviner regarding Jeroboam?" The "account" or "history" of Samuel the seer possibly refers to our books of Samuel. In 1 Kings xi, 41, the only source of the history of Solomon that is mentioned is "the book of the history of Solomon". On the other hand, in 2 Chron. xii, 15, "the history of Rehoboam from first to last" is stated to have been "written in the history of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the diviner relating to . . .", where it is noteworthy that we have "in the history" and not "according to (*al*) the history". After Rehoboam and the division of the Solomonic kingdom, the references in the books of Kings are always to "the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah" and "the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel", while the Chronicler's references are to "the Book of the kings of Judah and Israel", by which our present books of Kings would be meant. The only exception is 2 Chron. xx, 34, where we find: "the rest of the history of Jehoshaphat from first to last, behold it is written in the history of Jehu, son of Hanani, which is an addition to the book of the kings of Israel." These "histories" and "accounts", literally "words", corresponded to what Dr. Weidner has called "chronicles" in Babylonia which were based on the official annals of the kingdom and of which the account of Kudur-lagamar's campaign against Babylonia,

published by Professor Pinches, is an example. While the royal annals were carefully dated, the "Chronicle" was usually content to mention only the name of the reigning king.

The royal and temple libraries of Western Asia and Egypt went back to an early date. In Egypt the surgical papyrus recently edited by Professor Breasted proves that they were already established in the age of the third dynasty, that is to say, in what used to be supposed to be the beginning of Egyptian history.¹ In Babylonia they already existed in the days of the dynasty of Akkad (2750 B.C.). Wherever Babylonian civilization extended the scribe and the library accompanied it. Such was the case in eastern Asia Minor, in Syria, and in Canaan, the meeting-place of the culture of the Euphrates and the Nile. And it was not only the royal and the temple library that existed, private individuals also had their collections of written documents. As far back as the time of the third dynasty of Ur (2300 B.C.) and in distant Cappadocia the agents of the Babylonian *illati* or "companies" who worked the copper and silver mines of the Taurus had their "safes" at Ganis on the Halys filled with commercial and legal documents as well as private letters. Different languages, moreover, could be represented in the same library, together with bilingual and trilingual vocabularies. In the two libraries of the Hittite capital at Boghaz Keui, for example, there were literary works in Mitannian and Proto-Hittite, as well as in Sumerian and Babylonian, and the recent French discoveries at Ras Shamra have shown that in Phœnicia also the same was the case. In the Mosaic period the Oriental world was as well stocked with books and what we should call public libraries as it was in the Greek epoch. But except in Upper Egypt only the books which were inscribed on clay have unfortunately survived.

¹ Baedeker's *Handbook to Lower Egypt* (p. 164), published in 1894, describes Zoser, in whose reign the treatise was written by his Minister and medical adviser, Imhotep, as "the mythical king Zoser".

That a royal library already existed at Jerusalem in the reign of Solomon we know from a passage in the book of Proverbs. In Prov. xxv, 1, we are told that the proverbs of Solomon, which may have included some of those of his contemporaries like Ethan or the sons of Mahol (1 Kings iv, 31), or the proverbs which, as we now know, were translated from an Egyptian collection, were re-edited in the reign of Hezekiah. How carefully the work was done we learn from documents in the library of Assur-bani-pal. Characters and passages which were defective were marked as *khibi* or "wanting", and where a character was doubtful and admitted of more than one reading the fact was stated. At the same time, re-editing, especially in the case of religious hymns and the like, allowed the excision of passages or words which were out of date, of the substitution of one word for another as, for instance, of "Merodach" for "Ellil" in the Epic of the Creation, of other adaptations to changed conditions, and more especially of additions. An example of the last in Hebrew literature is to be found in Isaiah (xvi, 13, 14), where we read: "This was the prophecy of Yahveh concerning Moab long ago, but now there is a prophecy declaring," etc.

The royal library of David and Solomon would have been preceded by temple libraries in the age of the Judges, as well as by collections of written documents in the prophetic schools when once these latter were organized (see 1 Sam. x, 25). Samuel as law-giver or *mēhoqêq* would have been accompanied by his scribe, as is indicated in Judges v, 14 and Gen. xlix, 10, and at Shiloh there would have been a temple library after the fashion of the surrounding countries and of the Canaanitish cities themselves. It is significant that as late as the reign of Solomon the "prophecies" of Ahijah the Shilonite were still being committed to writing.

At first sight it is surprising that the libraries were not destroyed from time to time by the invasions of foreign enemies and the looting and destruction of the cities them-

selves. But as a general rule it would appear that the civilized conquerors of the old Oriental world did not wage war against books. On the contrary, we find Assur-bani-pal carefully carrying tablets to Assyria from the libraries of Babylonia, or having copies made of the latter for his library at Nineveh. It was easier to transport papyrus rolls than clay tablets, and it thus becomes intelligible how the earlier records of Judah and Israel could be utilized by Jewish exiles in the reign of the Babylonian king Evil-merodach (2 Kings xxv, 27).

The chief ground for my old belief that the earlier Hebrew literature was written in cuneiform was that it is only with the fifth year of Rehoboam that annalistic dating begins in Israelitish history; before that we have only the indefinite "40 years", even the extracts from the annals of David in 2 Sam. viii-xi being undated; and I therefore concluded that the older records of the kingdom had been destroyed when Jerusalem was captured by Shishak. But the name of Jerusalem is conspicuous by its absence in the Karnak list of Jewish and Israelitish towns captured by Shishak, and both the books of Kings and the books of Chronicles emphasize the fact that Jerusalem was surrendered without a siege to the Egyptian invader and that no damage was done to the temple or the palace, the treasures contained in them alone being carried away by the conqueror. The library would have remained intact.

The library must have been a rich one, like the other libraries of the ancient world of the East. All branches of literature would have been represented in it. Of one branch in the Solomonic library a single example only remains in the Song of Solomon. And yet we are told in 1 Kings iv, 32 that there were once a thousand and five similar songs which would have been numbered and catalogued like the tablets in the libraries of Assyria and Babylonia. Of a parallel class of literature in the library of Samaria all that survives is Psalm xlv, which seems to celebrate the marriage of Ahab.
